

Solitude

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Summary: Most people don't get it, but Light understands loneliness--but then, so does L. And when they meet in the Kira case, perhaps they don't have to be so familiar with it anymore. Oneshot LightxL fic, examining Light's past and how they come together.

Chapter 1: Solitude

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A/N: Rated for language, content, and sexuality. Some noncon.

Most people don't get it, but Light *understands* loneliness.

He thinks that his mother gets it, maybe. He can see it in the soft-sad looks she gives him when Sayu will bring home a bunch of girlfriends and, eventually, a boyfriend or two.

And Light brings home no one.

Maybe she doesn't understand why, but she understands him being alone.

Light didn't notice it for a long time. This is because it is difficult to notice something when it is most always there.

He didn't notice he was lonely as a child. He had Sayu and his mother and even his father sometimes. He had books, and they were wonderful, he remembers. He had the modest-sized backyard that he could sit in and he was never bored with his own company so he was never lonely with his own company.

He had imagination, he remembers this. He can remember clear blue sky memories of just sitting in the backyard or the front room or his bedroom, just thinking thinking thinking all day. He remembers observing the other children, once he started school. It seemed that everyone had already formed friendships. Yet . . . he never felt lonely. He doesn't remember feeling lonely. He remembers imagining people there, next to him, talking to him or watching over him. He remembers thinking about his grandmother, who had died the year before he started school. She had had a firm, unyielding front that would melt like butter when she was around Light. She hadn't liked his father, and hadn't even paid much attention to Sayu, who looked a lot like his father. But to Light and his mother, she had always been attentive and kind.

And so Light would imagine her there. No, not imagine. He keeps using that word and it's not right, but he can't think of a better one. He knew she wasn't there, and *imagine* sort of implies that he would talk to her or that he thought that she was real in a way. He just thought of her standing there, watching him play or read or sit by himself.

And he wasn't lonely.

His parents had asked him a few years into his schooling why he didn't play with other children. Of course, he had been young and innocent and incredibly *stupid* back then, so he had told them. He'd been nearly eight years old and he'd told them about his grandmother and about other friends he thought of, friends that were as smart as him, who he didn't have to explain things to. Friends who could *do* something, instead of just playing soccer or sitting around stupid like everyone else.

They had been worried. Looking back, Light gets why, but then he was just a kid. He had a normal little sister and normal parents who were very proud of his grades and scores and behavior, but so worried about the little child who didn't talk almost at all unless it was to adults who asked questions, and who didn't bring friends home and who didn't seem to *care*.

They had taken him to a child psychologist. They hadn't told him who she was, but Light got it. He wasn't stupid, and it was funny because they seemed to keep forgetting that part.

The woman had been very nice. She was smart too, Light could tell that. She had to get lots of degrees to specialize in child psychology, and his father's job made enough money that they could afford someone pretty good. She mostly had him sit where he wanted and play with the toys that he wanted.

Light preferred the floor, and asked her if she had any books he could read.

She noticed that he kept glancing up, up and to the left, and she'd asked if there was someone there. Light told her that yes, in fact, it was his friend and he knew he wasn't there for real, but his friend was just there to make sure he was okay, that he wasn't alone with everything.

She had nodded like she got it. He had told her that imaginary friends for children his age were very normal and he didn't see what all the fuss was about.

And she had told him something he'd never forgotten.

"Yagami-kun," she'd said, very serious. He'd liked that she'd called him that, like they were speaking to each other proper. "Yagami-kun, it isn't what people *expect* of you. People *know* you are intelligent, they know you are capable. But children are expected to have friends, not just constructs they use to watch over them. I know it's hard. But if you want them to stop worrying, then you have to do what they expect."

It was the best damn advice anyone had ever given him.

Light had thanked her earnestly, and then he'd walked out and met his parents. He had only gone for a few sessions before the results started filtering in from his new behavior; his parents thought that the psychoist was some sort of miracle worker. When they asked what they'd done, Light had answered honestly. They had just talked.

But he *got it* now. He got what everyone was looking for. It wasn't for him to be happy, and he wasn't trying to be mean thinking about that. People wanted other people to fit into a nice, neat package with smartly tied bows that were the right color to match the wrapping paper. People wanted to be able to classify other people, and for them to behave according to code.

Light found his code.

His role is son, older brother, protector, student, genius, role model, kind, earnest. His role is to be perfect so they don't have to worry again, so they won't say he's abnormal, strange, worrisome (all whispered in the dark night across the kitchen table when they thought he was asleep).

He isn't angry with them. They are just people. And people, again, behave in a certain way. He was different, because of his intelligence, because he was isolated, because he lacked empathy. They didn't like the deviance; it unsettled them.

He missed the little imaginary constructs. He replaced them with real friends that he brought over and played with and smiled at with just the right amount of shine. He went over to their houses.

When he went to high school, he dropped many of the younger friends, in part because they went to different schools, in part because it was expected, and in part because he had never cared much for them anyways.

He didn't *dislike* people. But they had always seemed different and distant and so slow and stupid. He didn't hold it against them, it wasn't their fault. But Light isn't stupid, and it's not like he's going to somehow not notice that people are idiots.

An then . . . when one of his father's friends did things to him during a holiday party they'd held at the Yagami residence when he was eleven, Light had sat on the floor in his dark bedroom, exactly where he'd left him, and he wondered what he should do.

Light had wondered what would be expected. He wasn't stupid, he knew what had just happened. He knew that if he wanted to, he could make a big deal and his parents would probably believe him and they would go to court.

And he would have to testify, and the man would be upset and his parents and virtually *everyone* would be upset.

Light researched it. He needed to know what was expected, because this was a scenario he had never experienced. His eyes skimmed the webpages. He ignored the parts that said he should tell, that he should make a big deal, and he looked for what *typically* happened.

Because what you *should* do (like *never lie, always be yourself*) was different from what people *really* did (like *lying, faking, acting, hiding*).

And on the psychology websites and in the books he found the next day at school, Light found that nearly seventy percent of all rapes went unreported, particularly when the victim knew the perpetrator. Light supposed that he knew him; he was his father's friend and Light had met him a few times before.

And he wasn't stupid. He knew it was wrong, and it had felt bad, physically and on the inside. In the months following, he felt sticky and itchy and like his insides had been replaced with the black stuff they used to make roads. Tar. Gravel. He felt like all that was coating the insides of his stomach.

He was supposed to report it. But no one expected him to.

So Light kept quiet. He did things about it, like exercising more and lifting weights and taking self-defense. And if his parents noticed that he was throwing himself into tennis and school and if they saw that he was more protective of Sayu, if they could tell that he had sad lines around his mouth and that some mornings he woke up crying, well, he was their first child and they probably thought most of it was normal; the rest they probably chalked up to the transition to high school or that he was a genius.

Light never forgot. He doesn't forget things. Whenever he would see that man, he would straighten and look him right in the eyes; Light would push back the shame he felt and the sometimes-agony at the memory, and he would look and *make sure* that that man knew that he remembered and that he wouldn't forgive.

All-in-all, when his father came home and announced that the man had hung himself when Light was seventeen, Light had had to turn away to hide his smile.

Good. Six years later and he finally gets that he's a piece of shit the world is better off without. It wasn't just Light who had surmised that train of thought either; he hacked into police records and found the man's suicide note, which mentioned that he couldn't live with some of the things he did, with people just staring at him with eyes that knew too much and he was going insane!

That night, Light had stared in the mirror at his eyes for hours, wondering if he had that power—to kill, to make people insane with guilt. Tentatively, Light decided that maybe, if he was willing to work at it, he could.

The next day, he found the Death Note.

It was the single most beautiful thing he'd ever seen, and that's why he'd picked it up. The black cover was unrepentant, the rules did not bend. They were there for him to dance and dart around and twist and manipulate but never break. Death was final. Everyone was equalized by death. Whether or not what happened after death was different was someone else's damn problem.

He could feel a flurry of power like a blizzard rushing through his veins, blowing hard and ice-cold in his stomach, finally for the first time in years freezing that boiling tar and painting it over in white, nice white clean snow.

Yes, he was clean again. And his family still didn't know, and he still did what they and his teachers and everyone expected.

After a long day of sitting painfully bored and only vaguely contemptuous of classmates at school, Light remembers walking home, moving faster as he got nearer, lips twitching up into a smile and the adrenaline beginning to beat low and quick in his veins, like war drums. He would play nice with his mother and sister until it was appropriate for him to go upstairs, and then . . .

He could *feel* death on his fingertips as he pressed his pen onto the paper and wrote in perfectly formed kanji—each criminal's name, spelled correctly and (when he was feeling playful) with a cause of death written exactly ten centimetres away from the name.

That feeling would spread from his slender hands into tanned arms and shoulders and into the rest of his body, making him feel both cold and very warm, sedated and intensely aware, all at once. As if in a trance—a wonderful, if short-lived trance—he could feel his thoughts slow until all he was was criminals' names and faces and the scritch and glide of pen on crisp white paper.

He was always sorry when he'd done enough for one day, always sorry he couldn't help the world more—but he knew he had to give criminals a chance to change their ways, he had to give warning instead of just killing them all. Besides, he had homework and family duties to attend to.

So he'd lock away the Death Note, thumb just brushing the cover once, as if to thank the slim notebook for all it unwittingly gave him, and all the crushing pain and swirling confusion it took away, just by putting control back into his hands.

And Ryuk! . . . Well, he was nothing like Light's grandmother, and Light never told him about it, but he liked having someone look at him, constantly watch him and analyze. He liked having someone who could see the same beauty he did in the thin black notebook. In a quiet part of his soul that he rarely listened to, he whispered that he liked never being alone.

It hurt to be alone. It always hurt.

And then!

And then . . .

And then there was L.

Beautiful. Absolutely exquisite. Someone who never took his eyes off of Light, someone with cameras and intelligence and time and interest. Someone as smart as him, as determined and dangerous as him.

It was . . . amazing. Wonderful. The best thing . . .

He would have given up the Death Note a hundred times if it meant that L could stay with him. The Death Note, the killing, even things like school and tennis, were all substitutes. He had to keep busy, always moving, always active doing something never stopping only pause a few hours to sleep get up keep going go go go go!

Or he would look around and realize how, except for that tar, he was so so empty. And so chillingly alone.

When he was getting ready to leave the Death Note behind and get himself arrested and forget, he promised himself that if he could find a way to make L stay, he would forget about all of it. If he could have one person near him that got it, that knew about expectations and didn't care, who just wanted *Light*, then Light would let everything else go.

He had been so relieved to finally say, "I forfeit it."

And then . . . happiness.

He was sure his father could see it. Yes, he remembered that awful man and his stomach hurt at times, but then there was L and he was *never* alone and even when L was accusing him or ignoring him, it was wonderful.

He just didn't want to be alone. And with the chain, he didn't have to be. He had hoped that it wouldn't end. He didn't think it was too much to ask—to not have to be alone. Millions—no, billions of other people on the planet had at least some form of companionship, so why shouldn't he? Why should all his relationships be one-sided and performed out of duty?

Perhaps it was this line of thinking that made him realize that he really didn't care what his father or anyone else thought of his friendship with L.

He had actually stopped seeing the expression on his father's face—he'd stopped seeing him entirely—when he and L would walk down the stairs after the task force had arrived, Light laughing and L wearing that thin smile of his that Light loved to cause.

It wasn't always sunshine and roses; in fact, those moments were more rare. But much of the time, even if they weren't speaking or directly communicating, Light found himself smiling just because there was someone here who got it, who could *understand*, just like him.

So if his father didn't look pleased at how they'd come late to the workday and then breeze past the rest of the task force without so much as a 'Good morning' on their way to breakfast, well, Light found that for the first time in his life, he didn't care.

Conversation with L was always interesting; and they could be talking about anything from quantum mechanics to time travel to Jane Austen novels to pop culture, and it didn't matter. They didn't even have to argue about all the stuff they talked about—for Light (and he suspected for L as well), it was enough that he was just there with someone finally on his own level.

He didn't even mind sleeping in the same bed—no, that isn't right. He minded, but not because L frightened him like others may have. He only minded because he did still, from time to time, have horrible nightmares and while it was good to wake up to L's near-concerned expression, it was also humiliating for him to have L see him cry.

After waking up during one of those dream-memories, Light had opened his eyes and then sat up (just like in the movies, he'd noted with annoyance), smoothing the covers out in front of him and looking around the room surreptitiously just to make sure he was where he thought he was. He noticed L (always awake) looking curiously at him out of the corner of his eye, but he didn't look up until he was sure his eyes were done watering.

Finally, he wiped under his eyes, just once, and laid back down on the bed, burrowing under the covers and willing the harsh and dark images out of his mind so he could sleep again. He'd almost succeeded (not in removing the scenes still playing over and over, but in falling asleep), when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

To his further embarrassment, Light didn't realize what it was—or, rather, who it was—at first, and he flinched and let out a very quiet dry sob before reaching full wakefulness. Then he blinked a few times and sat up and stared at L, who still had his hand outstretched as though to comfort him.

Light averted his eyes, certain that L could see the desperate shame in them as clearly as Light was feeling it. "I'm-sorry," he said jerkily. He took a deep breath, not realizing how shaken he really was until he completely expanded his lungs and could feel his heartbeat slow in response. "Sorry," he murmured again, and now he sounded more in control, less like a frightened child (though half the time, that was all he ever was, but L was not to know that).

"Light-kun . . ." L began, and then cut himself off, chewing on his nail, regarding Light with dark eyes as though he didn't know what to say.

"It was just a little nightmare," Light told him, moving closer to him so they could sit side by side. "I'm fine. Sorry if I woke you."

L recognized the sarcasm in Light's dry voice, and smiled a bit in return. "Light-kun knows very well that I was not asleep," he said. "I am, however, a bit concerned . . ."

"About one little dream?" Light asks. "I told you, it was just—"

"I remember what Light-kun told me," L interrupted. "However, I have noticed that these nightmares are unusually frequent for someone with your history, and I am wondering why."

"My history?" Light quoted. "What is that supposed to mean?" He studied his fingers instead of looking up, wondering why it still felt so good to sit next to L, to feel the heat radiating off of him, even while he was being interrogated.

"Hmm," L murmured. He bit at his thumb again, and only stopped when Light pulled his hand away from his mouth.

"You're going to hurt yourself like that," Light told him softly.

"I assure Light-kun, it is merely a habit. I have very rarely broken skin, and each time it was unintentional," L said, sounding just a bit cross.

Light sighed and released the hand, which surprisingly stayed resting on L's knees instead of moving as though by magnetic force to his lips.

They sat in comfortable silence for a long moment and Light allowed his head to rest back against the headboard, revelling just a little in the quiet of the night that no longer frightened him with L next to him.

"Your nightmares?" L prompted after another minute or two.

Light turned his head to look at his friend—friend, what a strange and delightful word. "What did you want to know?" he asked.

"Light-kun could start by telling me what they are about," L suggested.

Light shrugged. "I can't remember very well after I wake up," he said. "But the residual fear will cling to me afterwards a bit is all."

L frowned a bit. "It is unlikely that Light-kun remembers very little about his dreams, since it is obvious that after he wakes up, he has to try to forget about them so he may sleep again."

L always was a tricky, observant little bastard.

"They're not . . . important," Light finally countered. "And what's that you were saying about my history?"

"I have researched Light-kun extensively, he knows that," L explained. "Nothing ever suggested to me that he'd undergone some kind of childhood trauma that could have caused recurrent nightmares."

Light couldn't help it—he shivered a little at the phrase 'childhood trauma.' What an awful, clinical way to describe that horrible . . . *thing* that had happened to him.

L, as was his wont, caught the trembling and looked at Light curiously. "Unless it was never recorded, or discovered, or reported," he prompted softly.

Light stared exactly into L's eyes, trying to look as normal as possible when he said, "L, there really is nothing in my childhood. Now, if you want to look into the near past and the 53 days in solitary confinement combined with my father pointing a gun at my head, all on the whim of a supposed friend, perhaps then you will find a reason for my nightmares."

L's eyes widened, and Light tried not to let the regret stain his features. He hadn't meant to say all that, he didn't really mean it, he knew that L was just doing what he absolutely had to, that they weren't really friends at that point.

For a long moment, L was silent and Light was terribly afraid that he had injured him. Then he let out a breath Light didn't know he was holding and said, "The fact that Light-kun is suddenly so defensive suggests to me that I am correct in my new hypothesis."

"I'm not allowed to be upset at the moderately inhumane treatment I've suffered at your hands?" Light asked, struggling to keep his query light and airy-sounding.

"You've never mentioned it before," L answered, and Light doesn't miss the switch from third to second-person.

"I—" Light realized that he was gearing up for an argument and took a deep breath. He didn't want to fight with L, he reminded himself. He liked L. He valued their relationship. "Sorry," he finally finished. "I didn't want to start an argument, and those experiences really weren't as bad as they could have been. I know it was for the case—and I would have done the same."

If L was surprised by his sudden change in tone and attitude, he didn't show it. "So the dreams?" he asked, and Light was surprised at the gentleness in his voice.

He shrugged. "I don't know, L," he answered. "I could give you all kinds of hypotheses and explanations, but I don't know why they're happening. Something in my subconscious, I'm sure."

"Hmmm," L murmured again. "I think you do know, Light-kun, and I wish for you to tell me."

Light laughed a little at that. "Why?" he asked. "So you can hold that over my head too?"

L looked surprised at the aggression in his tone, and Light had to remind himself, *again*, that L was no threat, that he was his friend. It just wasn't typical, wasn't normal for him. He was always defensive, possibly more than even L realized, and he got angry when he was cornered.

"I'm sorry," he apologized again, putting his head in his hands and willing the anger and panic away. "I don't know what's gotten into me, L. I don't mean it. I'm just . . . tired, and these nightmares really are awful." There, perhaps now that he'd gotten a slice of truth, L could leave him alone.

"What are they about?" Or not. Light had forgotten that when it came to truth, L wanted the whole pie. Actually when it came to any kind of pie L was that way.

"I . . . I don't feel comfortable telling you, L," Light admitted. "It's not something I share very freely." *It's not something I share at all*, he amended in his mind. He was working very hard at this point to keep his breathing normal and his tone light.

L frowned. "Does your father know?" he asked.

Light barely managed to stop himself from laughing aloud. "No," he admitted. "He doesn't."

"Your mother? Sister?"

"No, no one in my family."

"Friends?"

Light did laugh at that one. "No."

"So who does know?"

"I do," Light said firmly.

"That's it?"

"That's all."

A long pause. Then, "I think perhaps Light-kun could benefit psychologically from sharing it with someone."

Light sighed and settled back into bed. "You don't even know what it is—and besides, it's not as though you're exactly an open book, *Ryuuzaki*," he murmured, stressing the alias. "I don't know anything about you—I like you, but it's hard for me to trust someone I know nothing about."

L considered this. "That's fair," he admitted.

Light nodded, letting his eyes slip shut but opening them quickly as another scene was waiting just behind his eyelids for him. It was like a fucking film reel and he was getting really, really tired of being tired and afraid all the time. He glared sullenly at his pillow, trying to ignore how L was still staring at him.

"Light-kun," L started, but hesitated when he saw the exhaustion evident on Light's features. Instead of interrogating him further, L decided that it could wait until at least the morning, and instead asked, "What can I do to help?"

"With the nightmares?" Light asked, and L nodded. Light hesitated, knew that L might not like it, but finally his exhaustion got the better of him, and he motioned for L to lay down. When they were side by side, Light moved gingerly closer and settled down so he could just feel the heat emanating off L's body. "There," he said.

"This helps?" L asked, a little nervously. Light nodded and curled in a little closer.

"Feels safe," he mumbled, tiredness already getting the better of him.

"All right," L agreed. And just before Light drifted off to sleep, he could feel L's fingertips grazing through his hair and he smiled.

And that was how it started; at first, Light didn't really think of the repercussions, or of the possibility of extending the relationship further physically or emotionally.

Looking back, there wasn't a point when Light could say that it stopped being platonic and started being romantic. He doesn't even remember the first night they'd properly kissed, since there had been accidental brushing of lips against bare shoulders or collarbones or not-so-accidental touching against another pair of lips when their faces got too close.

He remembers the gentle wonderment at being so close to someone and not being afraid—something he'd never really thought possible. He remembers those feather light touches, trailing fingers along the thin ribs on L's side when the detective did take one of his rare naps. He can remember L doing the same to him when he thought Light was asleep—and at first Light has no doubt that they didn't think anything of it, that they weren't even thinking attraction, only fascination.

He remembers the strong feeling of *wanting* one night, wanting to press harder with his fingertips, or to replace his fingers with his lips—and so he did, just brushing lips along the side of L's throat. And the resultant catch of breath from the detective, and the shallowing of his own breath . . .

Days turned to weeks turned to months of this routine, of sort of dancing and spiralling down together, almost completely aware of where they were headed, but going there with a wilful ignorance so it couldn't frighten either of them.

Light doesn't even remember when the light touches turned to heavy, fumbling hands on hot, slick skin; nor when those feather-kisses on cheeks and eyelids became mouths pressed hard together, tongues and teeth and oh, so *good* . . .

It was so gradual, that it just felt *right*, even when hands drifted a little lower, or when he lay flush against L's body, only the thin layer of their boxers keeping them from fully touching; rubbing together, things so hot and hard and L's hips bucked up to meet his as he ground them closer, tighter, harder, *oh God* . . .

And if L noticed that Light would freeze up when he tried to reverse positions or take it too fast, or if sometimes he didn't want to kiss him at all, he seemed not to take it personally.

What Light does remember is when he realized he actually loved L.

"Light-kun," L said one day once the rest of the team had gone home, "seems very happy."

Light's smile had been genuine, but L hadn't looked unsettled by how sharp and intense it was, like other people would have been. "I am happy, L," he answered. He had meant it. So strange. He had meant it.

"Why?"

Light was surprised at that. "Why shouldn't I be?" he asked.

"I believe that the notion of imprisonment and a certain pair of handcuffs come to mind," L commented.

Light looked down at the chain in question, surprised. "I don't mind," he said honestly. "I just like . . ." he looked down again, embarrassed. "Just being here . . . with you. I like you." And then he'd frozen, had the breath knocked completely out of him, because it wasn't *like* that his mind and body were saying, it was not *like* that he felt for the dark-haired and beautiful detective sitting next to him.

L looked down as well, and Light rather suspected he was hiding a blush. "In that case," he said, and Light thought that maybe he knew what Light really meant when he said 'I like you', "I have something I want to tell Light-kun."

"Tell me."

L took a deep breath and began playing with his sugar cube fortress as he spoke. "I was born in France and I lived with my parents until they died when I was about four years old," he murmured quietly, sounding more like he was telling a fairy tale than his own life. "My father was killed in an electrical accident, and my mother . . . was never a very stable creature, although I do not remember much of anything about her. She took her own life very soon after. And as I had no relatives, I became a ward of the state." L paused to breathe for a moment and to look at Light, expression pleading with him to understand why he was doing this, what he hoped to accomplish.

Light leaned in and kissed him softly. "Keep going," he suggested, nodding in encouragement. L took another deep breath.

"Watari found me when I was six. IQ tests recommended me to him, and after our first meeting, he took me to a more stable orphanage than the ones I was used to—one specifically designed for gifted children, brilliant children. Like me. I was one of the first children to attend, and it did wonders for me. I had been starved to learn until that point—I'd had to teach myself reading, writing, languages, mathematics . . . Anyway, I wanted to become a detective by the time I was nine, and I began solving cases at 15. That's . . . more or less my story, I wish it were more interesting—but . . . I just . . . thought you should know. Since I know nearly everything about you . . . I just thought we should be even."

Light wanted very much to reciprocate, he even took a deep breath, but with his exhalation, he found himself saying, "Thank you—very much. And . . . I'm sorry about your parents."

L looked a little puzzled. "It's all right," he said. "I had many more opportunities this way—I can't say that I'm too sorry. I didn't want sympathy, just . . . for you to understand."

"I know," Light said, expression sober. "And . . . my nightmares are about something . . . terrible that happened when I was about eleven. You're right—it wasn't ever recorded. I just . . . I don't talk about it. I'm trying, but—just give it some time?"

"Of course." And for once, L let it go.

Light remembers with equal parts trepidation and fondness the night that he, after some of their favorite nighttime activities, had curled around L, who automatically turned over to him and rested his head over his heartbeat.

Light moved his long fingers down over L's back and then up to his dark, soft, now damp hair. He threaded his fingers through and massaged the scalp. For a moment, they both listened, just listened to the rain that would make Tokyo clean for just a few minutes.

"L," Light whispered, afraid that anything louder would break the gentle susurrance of the rain.

L didn't raise his head, but as usual Light could feel his gaze shift to his face. He shivered. "Hmm?" L murmured.

"I'm not . . ." Light tried. He stopped and tried again. "Just let me talk, okay?" L nodded and Light squirmed at the feeling of soft-feather hair tickling his chest. "I'm not Kira. I know you don't think I'm not. But I'm telling you . . . And if I wasn't, if you were sure, if we caught Yotsuba Kira and no one else died and . . . I was still here . . ." He stopped again and swallowed. L had raised his head and his dark eyes looked like pools of tar in the black room and Light shivered again and averted his gaze. "Would you want me?" he whispered. "To keep? Do you just want me because I'm here, I like you, I'm available? Or would you take me with you?"

L sat up and looked at him, a positively fathomless expression on his normally-stoic face.

Light sat up too and looked down at the floor as he spoke, the words coming hard and fast. "I know I'm young and I know you don't . . . but I could help you, I could work with you, come with you?"

When L did speak, it was not what Light expected to hear. "Light-kun would give up all the rest of his life because he'd rather spend it with me?" he asked. Light could not interpret that tone.

"Yes," Light whispered. To his horror, he felt the very beginning of tears prick the edges of his eyes. God, he hadn't cried in . . . seven years. "No one means as much. You don't . . . It's not—" He paused and gave up for a moment, finally setting for, "I'm not alone with you here." He finally raised his head, searching L's expression for something, some give, some flicker of warmth that would tell him yes, he could stay and not be lonely or hurt anymore.

But L just frowned and said, "I suppose this could be some sort of advanced form of Stockholm's . . ."

Light's eyes widened and he leaned forward and shook him. "This is *not*," he paused to take a breath, "some kind of disorder, L. I love—I love being around you, I love how I feel safe around you. Do you feel anything similar, anything complementary to that?"

L's eyes stayed with his. "I don't . . . I don't know," he finally said. "It is immoral. I suspect you . . ." Light greatly suspected that L often went to great lengths not to think about this much of the time.

"Just pretend," Light said desperately, still holding onto L's shoulders, remembering his elementary school days. "Just pretend like this was a normal relationship and I wasn't your suspect and there was no more Kira. Would you want to keep me because of *me*?"

Somehow, L must have seen how very important his answer was to Light, because his bland expression softened and he cupped Light's face in one hand and whispered, "Yes."

And Light let out a breath he hadn't known he'd been holding and then took another deep one so he wouldn't cry. "Good," he said. He looked into L's eyes again, so close to his own. "Because I'm *not* Kira, and I don't want to leave."

"Your father?" L prompted.

Light pulled away. "I hate him," he whispered sharply.

L looked startled.

"He was never home," Light tried to explain. "He didn't listen, I didn't expect them to, and even when I hurt it wasn't expected, so I just had to keep quiet and even if I wanted to talk or have him there to feel safe he never was and I was alone . . ." He stopped himself, realizing that he was rambling.

"Light-kun?" L asked after a long moment of silence.

"We needed him home, a lot," he said. "I worked hard—worked myself until there was nothing left, but it still wasn't enough that he came home. He's not mean—he cares in an abstract sort of way. A 'I'm supposed to have a family and supposed to care about them, so I do' sort of way." Light took a breath, but suddenly found that he wasn't finished.

"It was his coworker, you know," he said, voice barely above a whisper. The agony in his words surprised even him. It had been years—did he even have the right to be upset anymore?

"It was—my nightmares, you know. He's dead now. I mean . . . He's the one who . . . hurt me." He took a deep shuddering breath and looked away from L's understanding eyes. "Raped me," he ground out, forcing the words past his teeth; they burned his tongue, and as soon as that awful, dirty word was out, he wanted to take it back, make it so it never happened. "In my own room, during this party my parents threw. I felt sick so I stayed upstairs and I think . . . I'm pretty sure he was looking for the bathroom. He was . . . drunk, and-he—" Light broke off, found he couldn't continue.

At some point during his dialogue, L had come and just held him. Now, he held even tighter as Light trembled from the effort of keeping himself from crying over it *again*.

"Light," L whisperd, holding him close and running fingers through his hair. "I'm so sorry."

"I know that I should have told," Light told him. "I *know* that. But it wasn't . . . I mean, I looked it up, I was just trying to do what was typical, and most . . . most things like that go unreported, you know."

"You didn't tell because you thought no one would expect you to?" L asked, and his voice was so sad that Light regretted talking at all.

"That's the gist of it, yes," Light murmured. He pulled away from L suddenly. "I hate him," he said, meeting L's eyes, daring him to tell him he was wrong. "I hate him and I'm glad he killed himself. Who the hell does that? To some—some eleven-year-old kid? For no reason other than—he just . . . wanted—" Light stopped suddenly, choking on the words. He breathed deep for several long seconds.

"It's okay," L told him after a little while. "Light, it's all right to feel that."

Light continued staring at the duvet cover on the bed. When he spoke next, his voice was dull and defeated. "He didn't have to do that," he said. "He had no reason—he was just a horrible person. It doesn't matter that he was drunk, it doesn't matter that he was sorry or that he paid for that and maybe other sins with his life. It wasn't like he was embezzling money or vandalizing. It was my *life* that he ruined. My *self*. For no other reason than he was drunk and it seemed like a good idea at the time."

"I know," L was murmuring as he continued to hold tight to Light's hands. "I'm so sorry, Light."

Light's voice picked up more emotion as he continued. "I've never been so damn scared in my life, L. It hurt—I thought I was going to die. I *wanted* to die, and I don't even remember everything I said. I was just asking, over and over, for him to stop, asking why he wouldn't—" he broke off, voice cracking. "He never said anything to me, except he just . . . at the end, he *thanked* me, like I had done something—something right, something that made it better and oh my God, L, every single day every day I think about it and it's always my fault when I remember it, I feel guilty and *wrong* every single time, and I think what could I have done, what should I have done and—"

Light didn't even realize that he was nearly hysterical until L gathered him in his arms and held him tightly, murmuring, "I know, Light, it's all right, it isn't your fault, it's all right."

Light stopped talking and, on the verge of tears, whispered, "I still don't know why. I still don't get it."

"There isn't a reason," L said sadly. "You were right before—he was just a horrible person, Light. You didn't do anything to deserve it, and there was nothing you could have done to stop it."

"I *hate* him," Light hissed. And, almost as an afterthought, he added, "And me."

L was silent for a long time, and then he finally kissed the nearest part of Light—the top of his head—and said, "Well, I hate him too; but I love you."

And finally, after so many years of keeping his lips tightly pressed together when he fell asleep so he wouldn't scream, after years of trembling with the effort of concealing emotion, of never speaking and always letting his mind run cruel circles of hatred and rage around him, Light finally let himself just cry.

A week later, he touched the Death Note and just *screamed*.

Which is how Light has come to this, trembling as he checks the names in the Death Note, trying to decide if it's worth killing Higuchi or not, trying to choose and it *shouldn't* be much of a choice, but the Death Note is very strong and persuasive and he can feel that now . . .

He keeps telling himself that he has more time, that they all have more time, that Higuchi will be captured and there will be plenty of time to kill him if L ever goes back on his promise and Light can't take it he doesn't want to kill him at all; the Death Note is a poor substitute for company now that he has the real thing.

He can see Rem, the ugly monster, standing silent and stoic over by Higuchi's car and he feels a surge of hate towards her. How dare she make him be with Misa, how dare she endanger L? If he could kill anyone it would be her.

L notices him staring and he puts his hand over Light's to ask if he's okay and suddenly, suddenly . . .

He is.

He holds up the Death Note. "Can I not touch this anymore?" he asks. "It's kind of . . . creepy. I don't like it, and as a suspect, I guess I shouldn't be handling it . . ."

L nods, looking surprised, but he just gestures that Light should hand it off to Watari, which he does.

And then he gets to forget again, and it is wonderful.

And that night when they go to bed, Light doesn't know why he's so deliriously happy but he chalks it up to the case being almost over and the promise L made. He kisses L again and again and when he does finally go to sleep, he doesn't dream of anything except peace for the first time in a very long time.

The killings stop. Every time Light touches the Death Note, he jumps back, which he supposes that L must chalk up to nerves. And he forgets, but he retains a fear enough to stay away.

And now it has been three months and he doesn't remember and L *does* remember the promise. No killing for three months and Light still stays with him even without the handcuffs.

And if Light's father sees how they look at each other, how there are little touches and smiles and if he thinks strangely about how Light nearly always stays the night, well . . .

Well, for the first time, he is the father he always should have been, and he is quiet.

They tell him together, though Light mostly talks, when they have decided to leave. And again, even though he is losing his perfect son, even though he wasn't *expecting* it, he is quiet.

They are not perfect people; they argue and L sulks and Light pouts and it is overall a tumultuous existence. But mostly, it is soft and nice and most of all, it is safe.

And they are together.

A/N: And they all lived happily ever after! I'm just kidding—they had lots of problems, don't even worry about it. This is still probably my favorite oneshot, though I added a LOT to it this time around. Please let me know if you liked it! I adore getting reviews! Oh, and let me know if you think a sequel is a good idea or not—I might do it, but it might also be sort of complete all on its own.